

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 002948

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/25/2014

TAGS: [ECON](#) [GG](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT SAAKASHVILI'S FIRST VISIT TO TURKEY

REF: 2003 ANKARA 0541

(U) Classified by DCM Robert Deutsch, E.O. 12958, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: During President Saakashvili's first-ever May 20-22 visit to Turkey, he expressed satisfaction with the GOT's position on Ajara and asked the Turks to help convince Russia to give up its Georgian bases, according to Georgian DCM Tabatadze. His GOT interlocutors expressed support for Georgian territorial integrity and sovereignty, encouraged Saakashvili to peaceably settle differences with South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and made a surprisingly strong pitch for resettlement of Meskhetian Turks. The GOT promised to continue military assistance to Georgia. The GOT appears to have convinced Saakashvili to ease controls and fees at the border, but other economic and commercial overtures yielded no definite results. End Summary.

Regional Issues

2. (C) Saakashvili expressed his satisfaction with the position the GOT took during the Ajara confrontation that ended with Abashizde's May 6 departure. Turkish interlocutors said they support for Georgian territorial integrity and sovereignty but cautioned that differences with South Ossetia and Abkhazia should be solved peacefully. Saakashvili asked the Turks to push Russia to give up its Georgian bases. FM Gul raised Azeri/Armenian relations, saying he hoped Georgia would help foster dialogue and encourage Armenian withdrawal from occupied territory.

3. (C) From the beginning, the Turks pushed Saakashvili for resettlement of Meskhetian Turks; Tabatadze said this was a major GOT issue in all meetings. The GOT was previously reluctant to push the GOG on this, due to Georgia's delicate internal political situation (reftel). Saakashvili reiterated the GOG's commitment to fulfill its COE obligations, but said Georgia's economic problems presented too great a burden to permit resettlement now; Georgia will focus first on its own IDPs. In any event, Saakashvili added, the GOG will not resettle the Meskhetians in their areas of origin, which are currently occupied by ethnic Armenians, because this could lead to ethnic tension.

Military Issues

4. (C) Saakashvili expressed appreciation for Turkish military assistance, noting that Turkish-trained units had high morale and good discipline. The Turks promised to continue assistance to the 11th Brigade and a commando brigade, assistance to the Tbilisi military academy, and refurbishment of the Tbilisi military airport, including supply of communications equipment.

Economic/Commercial

5. (C) The Turks asked Saakashvili to reduce fees and streamline procedures for Turkish truckers crossing the Georgian border. The GOT blamed current border controls for a reduction in annual truck traffic from 25,000 to 8,000. According to a Georgian press report, upon his return from Turkey, Saakashvili went straight to the Sarpi border crossing and ordered customs officials to ease crossing procedures.

6. (C) The Turks had less luck in pressing Saakashvili for a double taxation agreement. Among other provisions, the GOT wants an agreement including a one-year tax exemption for Turkish construction firms; since most projects can be completed within a year, this would amount to a permanent exemption for Turkish firms. The two sides decided only to continue negotiations.

17. (C) Saakashvili highlighted his commitment to fight corruption and improve Georgia's foreign investment climate. The sides discussed possible Turkish renovation of the Batumi airport, construction of a railway linking Kars and Akhalkalaki, and other commercial ventures. Tabatadze said he heard lots of "talk" but no definite proposals; he expects no concrete commercial projects coming out of the visit.
EDELMAN